

Union Calendar No. 192

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3262

[Report No. 115–267]

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to establish pay grades and require competitive pay for physician assistants of the Department, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 17, 2017

Ms. KUSTER of New Hampshire (for herself and Mr. BERGMAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

JULY 28, 2017

Reported with an amendment, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in *italie*]

[For text of introduced bill, see copy of bill as introduced on July 17, 2017]

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to establish pay grades and require competitive pay for physician assistants of the Department, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 *This Act may be cited as the “Grow Our Own Direc-*
 5 *tive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act*
 6 *of 2017”.*

7 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL AS-**
 8 **SISTANCE TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS TO BE**
 9 **EMPLOYED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
 10 **ERANS AFFAIRS.**

11 *(a) PILOT PROGRAM.—*

12 *(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-*
 13 *fairs shall carry out a pilot program to be known as*
 14 *the “Grow Our Own Directive” or “G.O.O.D.” pilot*
 15 *program (in this section referred to as the “pilot pro-*
 16 *gram”) to provide educational assistance to certain*
 17 *former members of the Armed Forces for education*
 18 *and training as physician assistants of the Depart-*
 19 *ment of Veterans Affairs.*

20 *(2) INFORMATION ON PILOT PROGRAM.—The Sec-*
 21 *retary shall provide information on the pilot program*
 22 *to eligible individuals under subsection (b), including*
 23 *information on application requirements and a list of*
 24 *entities with which the Secretary has partnered under*
 25 *subsection (g).*

1 (b) *ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.*—*An individual is eligible*
2 *to participate in the pilot program if the individual—*

3 (1) *has medical or military health experience*
4 *gained while serving as a member of the Armed*
5 *Forces;*

6 (2) *has received a certificate, associate degree,*
7 *baccalaureate degree, master's degree, or*
8 *postbaccalaureate training in a science relating to*
9 *health care;*

10 (3) *is not eligible to participate in educational*
11 *assistance under chapter 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, or 35 of*
12 *title 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606 or 1607*
13 *of title 10, United States Code;*

14 (4) *has participated in the delivery of health*
15 *care services or related medical services, including*
16 *participation in military training relating to the*
17 *identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention*
18 *of diseases and disorders; and*

19 (5) *does not have a degree of doctor of medicine,*
20 *doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry.*

21 (c) *DURATION.*—*The pilot program shall be carried*
22 *out during the five-year period beginning on the date that*
23 *is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.*

24 (d) *SELECTION.*—

1 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary shall select not*
2 *less than 250 eligible individuals under subsection (b)*
3 *to participate in the pilot program.*

4 (2) *PRIORITY FOR SELECTION.*—*In selecting in-*
5 *dividuals to participate in the pilot program under*
6 *paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority to the*
7 *following individuals:*

8 (A) *Individuals who participated in the In-*
9 *termediate Care Technician Pilot Program of the*
10 *Department that was carried out by the Sec-*
11 *retary between January 2011 and February*
12 *2015.*

13 (B) *Individuals who agree to be employed*
14 *as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health*
15 *Administration at a medical facility of the De-*
16 *partment located in a community that—*

17 (i) *is designated as a medically under-*
18 *served population under section*
19 *330(b)(3)(A) of the Public Health Service*
20 *Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3)(A)); and*

21 (ii) *is in a State with a per capita*
22 *population of veterans of more than 9 per-*
23 *cent according to the National Center for*
24 *Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the*
25 *United States Census Bureau.*

1 (e) *EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.*—

2 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*In carrying out the pilot pro-*
3 *gram, the Secretary shall provide educational assist-*
4 *ance to individuals participating in the pilot pro-*
5 *gram, including through the use of scholarships, to*
6 *cover the costs to such individuals of obtaining a mas-*
7 *ter's degree in physician assistant studies or a simi-*
8 *lar master's degree.*

9 (2) *USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.*—*In providing*
10 *educational assistance under paragraph (1), the Sec-*
11 *retary shall use the Department of Veterans Affairs*
12 *Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program*
13 *under chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code, and*
14 *such other educational assistance programs of the De-*
15 *partment as the Secretary considers appropriate.*

16 (3) *USE OF SCHOLARSHIPS.*—*The Secretary*
17 *shall provide not less than 35 scholarships under the*
18 *pilot program to individuals participating in the*
19 *pilot program during each year in which the pilot*
20 *program is carried out.*

21 (f) *PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.*—

22 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary shall enter into*
23 *an agreement with each individual participating in*
24 *the pilot program in which such individual agrees to*
25 *be employed as a physician assistant for the Veterans*

1 *Health Administration for a period of obligated serv-*
2 *ice specified in paragraph (2).*

3 (2) *PERIOD SPECIFIED.*—*With respect to each*
4 *individual participating in the pilot program, the pe-*
5 *riod of obligated service specified in this paragraph*
6 *for the individual is—*

7 (A) *if the individual is participating in the*
8 *pilot program through a program described in*
9 *subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obli-*
10 *gated service, the period specified with respect to*
11 *such program; or*

12 (B) *if the individual is participating in the*
13 *pilot program other than through a program de-*
14 *scribed in such subsection, or if such program*
15 *does not specify a period of obligated service, a*
16 *period of three years or such other period as the*
17 *Secretary considers appropriate for purposes of*
18 *the pilot program.*

19 (g) *BREACH.*—

20 (1) *LIABILITY.*—*Except as provided in para-*
21 *graph (2), an individual who participates in the pilot*
22 *program and fails to satisfy the period of obligated*
23 *service under subsection (f) shall be liable to the*
24 *United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for the*
25 *amount that has been paid or is payable to or on be-*

1 *half of the individual under the pilot program, re-*
 2 *duced by the proportion that the number of days*
 3 *served for completion of the period of obligated service*
 4 *bears to the total number of days in the period of ob-*
 5 *ligated service of such individual.*

6 (2) *EXCEPTION.—If an individual is partici-*
 7 *pating in the pilot program through a program de-*
 8 *scribed in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of*
 9 *obligated service, the liability of the individual for*
 10 *failing to satisfy the period of obligated service under*
 11 *subsection (f) shall be determined as specified with re-*
 12 *spect to such program.*

13 (h) *MENTORS.—The Secretary shall ensure that a phy-*
 14 *sician assistant mentor or mentors are available for indi-*
 15 *viduals participating in the pilot program at each facility*
 16 *of the Veterans Health Administration at which a partici-*
 17 *pant in the pilot program is employed.*

18 (i) *PARTNERSHIPS.—In carrying out the pilot pro-*
 19 *gram, the Secretary shall seek to partner with the following:*

20 (1) *Not less than 15 institutions of higher edu-*
 21 *cation that—*

22 (A) *offer a master’s degree program in phy-*
 23 *sician assistant studies or a similar area of*
 24 *study that is accredited by the Accreditation Re-*

view Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant; and

(B) agree—

(i) to guarantee seats in such master's degree program for individuals participating in the pilot program who meet the entrance requirements for such master's degree program; and

(ii) to provide individuals participating in the pilot program with information on admissions criteria and the admissions process.

(2) Other institutions of higher education that offer programs in physician assistant studies or other similar areas of studies that are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.

(3) The Transition Assistance Program of the Department of Defense.

(4) The Veterans' Employment and Training Service of the Department of Labor.

(5) Programs carried out under chapter 41 of title 38, United States Code, for the purpose of marketing and advertising the pilot program to veterans

1 *and members of the Armed Forces who may be inter-*
2 *ested in the pilot program.*

3 *(j) ADMINISTRATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—For pur-*
4 *poses of carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall*
5 *appoint or select within the Office of Physician Assistant*
6 *Services of the Veterans Health Administration the fol-*
7 *lowing:*

8 *(1) A Deputy Director for Education and Career*
9 *Development of Physician Assistants who—*

10 *(A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and*
11 *employed by the Department as of the date of the*
12 *enactment of this Act;*

13 *(B) is responsible for—*

14 *(i) overseeing the pilot program;*

15 *(ii) recruiting candidates to partici-*
16 *pate in the pilot program;*

17 *(iii) coordinating with individuals*
18 *participating in the pilot program and as-*
19 *sisting those individuals in applying and*
20 *being admitted to a master's degree pro-*
21 *gram under the pilot program; and*

22 *(iv) providing information to eligible*
23 *individuals under subsection (b) with re-*
24 *spect to the pilot program; and*

1 (C) may be employed in the field at a med-
2 ical center of the Department.

3 (2) A Deputy Director of Recruitment and Re-
4 tention who—

5 (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and
6 employed by the Department as of the date of the
7 enactment of this Act;

8 (B) is responsible for—

9 (i) identifying and coordinating the
10 needs of the pilot program and assist the
11 Secretary in providing mentors under sub-
12 section (h) to participants in the pilot pro-
13 gram; and

14 (ii) coordinating the staff of facilities
15 of the Veterans Health Administration with
16 respect to identifying employment positions
17 and mentors under subsection (h) for par-
18 ticipants in the pilot program; and

19 (C) may be employed in the field at a med-
20 ical center of the Department.

21 (3) A recruiter who—

22 (A) reports directly to the Deputy Director
23 of Recruitment and Retention; and

24 (B) works with the Workforce Management
25 and Consulting Office and the Healthcare Talent

1 *Management Office of the Veterans Health Ad-*
2 *ministration to develop and implement national*
3 *recruiting strategic plans for the recruitment*
4 *and retention of physician assistants within the*
5 *Department.*

6 *(4) An administrative assistant, compensated at*
7 *a rate not less than level GS–6 of the General Sched-*
8 *ule, or equivalent, who assists with administrative*
9 *duties relating to the pilot program in the Office of*
10 *Physician Assistant Services and such other duties as*
11 *determined by the Secretary to ensure that the Office*
12 *runs effectively and efficiently.*

13 *(k) REPORT.—*

14 *(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after*
15 *the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of*
16 *Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Secretary*
17 *of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary*
18 *of Health and Human Services, shall submit to Con-*
19 *gress a report on the pilot program.*

20 *(2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-*
21 *graph (1) shall include the following:*

22 *(A) The extent to which the pilot program*
23 *is effective in improving the ability of eligible in-*
24 *dividuals under subsection (b) to become physi-*
25 *cian assistants;*

1 (B) *An examination of whether the pilot*
2 *program is achieving the goals of—*

3 (i) *enabling individuals to build on*
4 *medical skills gained as members of the*
5 *Armed Forces by entering into the physi-*
6 *cian assistant workforce of the Department;*
7 *and*

8 (ii) *helping to meet the shortage of*
9 *physician assistants employed by the De-*
10 *partment.*

11 (C) *An identification of such modifications*
12 *to the pilot program as the Secretary of Veterans*
13 *Affairs, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of*
14 *Defense, and the Secretary of Health and*
15 *Human Services consider necessary to meet the*
16 *goals described in subparagraph (B).*

17 (D) *An assessment of whether the pilot pro-*
18 *gram could serve as a model for other programs*
19 *of the Department to assist individuals in ob-*
20 *taining certification and employment in other*
21 *health care fields.*

22 (l) *SOURCE OF AMOUNTS.—Not less than \$8,000,000*
23 *of the amount necessary to carry out the pilot program shall*
24 *be derived from amounts appropriated to the Department*

1 *of Veterans Affairs before the date of the enactment of this*
 2 *Act.*

3 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARDS FOR THE DEPART-**
 4 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR USING**
 5 **EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO**
 6 **EDUCATE AND HIRE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS.**

7 *(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs*
 8 *shall establish standards described in subsection (b) to im-*
 9 *prove the use by the Department of Veterans Affairs of the*
 10 *Department of Veterans Affairs Health Professionals Edu-*
 11 *cational Assistance Program under chapter 76 of title 38,*
 12 *United States Code, and other educational assistance pro-*
 13 *grams of the Department, including the pilot program*
 14 *under section 2, to educate and hire physician assistants*
 15 *of the Department.*

16 *(b) STANDARDS.—The standards described in this sub-*
 17 *section are the following:*

18 *(1) Holding directors of medical centers of the*
 19 *Department accountable for failure to use the edu-*
 20 *cational assistance programs described in subsection*
 21 *(a) and other incentives—*

22 *(A) to advance employees of the Department*
 23 *in their education as physician assistants; and*

24 *(B) to improve recruitment and retention of*
 25 *physician assistants.*

1 (2) *Ensuring that the Department of Veterans*
2 *Affairs Education Debt Reduction Program under*
3 *subchapter VII of chapter 76 of such title is available*
4 *for participants in the pilot program under section 2*
5 *to fill vacant physician assistant positions at the De-*
6 *partment, including by—*

7 (A) *including in all vacancy announce-*
8 *ments for physician assistant positions the avail-*
9 *ability of the Education Debt Reduction Pro-*
10 *gram; and*

11 (B) *informing applicants to physician as-*
12 *stant positions of their eligibility for the Edu-*
13 *cation Debt Reduction Program.*

14 (3) *Monitoring compliance with the application*
15 *process for educational assistance programs described*
16 *in subsection (a) to ensure that such programs are*
17 *being fully utilized to carry out this section.*

18 (4) *Creating programs, including through the use*
19 *of the Department of Veterans Affairs Employee In-*
20 *centive Scholarship Program under subchapter VI of*
21 *chapter 76 of such title, to encourage employees of the*
22 *Department to apply to accredited physician assist-*
23 *ant programs.*

1 (c) *REGULATIONS.*—*The Secretary shall prescribe such*
 2 *regulations as the Secretary considers appropriate to carry*
 3 *out this section.*

4 **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF PAY GRADES FOR PHYSICIAN**
 5 **ASSISTANTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
 6 **ERANS AFFAIRS AND REQUIREMENT TO PRO-**
 7 **VIDE COMPETITIVE PAY.**

8 (a) *ESTABLISHMENT OF PAY GRADES.*—*Section*
 9 *7404(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by add-*
 10 *ing at the end the following:*

 “*PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCHEDULE*

 “*Physician Assistant IV.*

 “*Physician Assistant III.*

 “*Physician Assistant II.*

 “*Physician Assistant I.*”.

11 (b) *COMPETITIVE PAY.*—*Section 7451(a)(2) of such*
 12 *title is amended—*

13 (1) *by redesignating subparagraph (B) as sub-*
 14 *paragraph (C);*

15 (2) *by inserting after subparagraph (A) the fol-*
 16 *lowing new subparagraph (B):*

17 “*(B) Physician assistant.*”; *and*

18 (3) *in subparagraph (C), as redesignated by*
 19 *paragraph (1), by striking “and registered nurse”*
 20 *and inserting “registered nurse, and physician assist-*
 21 *ant”.*

22 (c) *NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN.*—

1 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary of Veterans Af-*
 2 *fairs shall implement a national strategic plan for the*
 3 *retention and recruitment of physician assistants of*
 4 *the Department of Veterans Affairs that includes the*
 5 *establishment and adoption of standards for the pro-*
 6 *vision of competitive pay to physician assistants of*
 7 *the Department in comparison to the pay of physi-*
 8 *cian assistants in the private sector.*

9 (2) *REPORT.*—*Not later than one year after the*
 10 *date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall*
 11 *submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the*
 12 *Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the*
 13 *House of Representatives a report on the implementa-*
 14 *tion of the national strategic plan under paragraph*
 15 *(1).*

16 **SEC. 5. EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT FOR COLLECTION OF**
 17 **FEES FOR HOUSING LOANS GUARANTEED BY**
 18 **SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

19 *Section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is*
 20 *amended—*

21 *(1) in subparagraph (A)—*

22 *(A) in clause (iii), by striking “September*
 23 *30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;*
 24 *and*

1 (B) in clause (iv), by striking “September
2 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;

3 (2) in subparagraph (B)—

4 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September
5 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;
6 and

7 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September
8 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;

9 (3) in subparagraph (C)—

10 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September
11 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;
12 and

13 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September
14 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;
15 and

16 (4) in subparagraph (D)—

17 (A) in clause (i), by striking “September
18 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”;
19 and

20 (B) in clause (ii), by striking “September
21 30, 2024” and inserting “December 31, 2024”.

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